

PURPOSE OF SKILLS

Alfred Adler was a physician, psychotherapist, and founder of Adlerian psychology, commonly referred to today as individual psychology. Individual psychology focuses on a client's development, whilst also providing the client with the core interconnectedness all humans crave and need: understanding and unconditional acceptance

Adler believed that we all have one desire and goal in life: to belong and to feel significant. Most of his research focussed on people's feelings of inferiority and superiority, effects of discouragement, and people's sense of belonging in their community and society as a whole. Adler argued that feelings of inferiority could result in neurotic behaviour; but, if an individual was taught how to harness the sense of inferiority without being defeated by it, it could be used as motivation to strive for greater successes in life.

A counselling practitioner can use Adler's core skill theories, to guide their clients to where they need to go; not through instruction, but from helping them enlighten, educate and inform themselves of themselves. A client will only be able to make lasting and effective change in their life once they are able to see the deeper meaning of their situation

BOTH PARTIES WORK TOWARDS AGREED GOALS

Success and growth in life are entirely dependent on an individual's future-oriented drive towards a significant goal. Unfortunately, most people are not aware of what their goals in life are, which was why Adler proposed an approach in therapeutic relationships in which both parties worked towards agreed goals together.

Adler's approach contradicts what many psychologists package themselves as: objective professionals whose job is to fix "broken" clientele. However, the main focuses of the Adlerian psychology is to establish a bond between client and counsellor before focusing on problems. What the counsellor then achieves through a series of interviews with the client is help them recognise patterns and details of personal stories and identify how the client usually copes in similar, or repeated, situations in life.

PURPOSE OF COUNSELLING IS ACHIEVING INSIGHT

Many counsellors actively pigeonhole their clients into psychological terms, treating each one as potential case study material, and treat them for that particular mental illness (according to a textbook), without ever asking their client what they want to achieve in life and through counselling.

A counsellor should never assume, or assign labels preemptively; they should only ever respond to what clients share with them. It is also not the role of the counsellor to give suggestions for future goals, but rather, ask questions which help a client to reflect on their life, discover their passions and ultimately establish goals for themselves.

The goal of counselling is to help the individual dismantle their negative and untrue perceptions of themselves, and move towards a more loving, understanding and accepting perception. When an individual gains clarity and insight into what specifically is not working in their life, they can finally begin to formulate a goal to work towards.



A TEACHING ROLE TO HELP CLIENTS IDENTIFY AND OVERCOME SELF-DEFEATING BEHAVIOUR

Adler didn't believe that therapy was a teaching role which educated people in the traditional sense, but rather, about helping clients become more educated about themselves by asking them the right questions.

The role of the counsellor was to help clients understand why they experience the outcomes they do in life, and learn what it is they're doing which causes them. It isn't about triggering clients to feel ashamed, embarrassed or hopeless about their self-defeating behaviours, but instead about encouraging them to take control of their lives, and realise they have the power in themselves to change and ultimately experience different outcomes.

ENCOURAGE SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT IN CLIENTS

Whilst we as individuals are whole entities in ourselves, we are also part of larger wholes — families, societies, cultures, friend groups, work environments, the planet, the cosmos, etc.. Because of this, it's highly likely that the way we respond to the first social system we're exposed to, the family, will become the prototype for our world view and attitudes towards life.

Connection is all about being socially involved with others. Social involvement is not the promotion of conformity, but the way in which someone behaves that gives them a sense of fitting into the stream of social evolution, which ultimately gives them a sense of security and belonging.

Most of the problems people experience in life will have a relational component to them, and one of the most common problems today is that people misplace their priorities. People have stopped living life, and instead spend their time working excessively long hours at the cost of connecting with others. By finding the relations between a client's priorities and the connections they desire from life, we can direct our clients to evaluate their needs in terms of their sense of belonging, and encourage them to think about re-prioritising their lives in a way which fosters more connection with the people around them and society at large.

INTERPRETATION USED TO CREATE LINKS BETWEEN CLIENT'S BEHAVIOURS AND UNDESIRED OUTCOMES

In order for clients to learn about themselves, a counsellor must only present back to the client what they've been sharing during a session so that they can process and evaluate what they've been saying. We do this through our already established techniques: paraphrasing, reflecting back, asking open questions, and summarising. By doing this we help our clients hear what they're actually saying, and by asking questions, the client is prompted to make connections between topics they bring up in the session, and the negative and destructive outputs which brought them to seek counselling.

CONFRONTATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT SET WITHIN EMPATHY

The general perception of 'confrontation' is largely negative; but it's important to remember that confrontation doesn't mean condemnation, nor does it require aggression. In Adlerian context, confrontation is purely about confronting the information presented, and when this confrontation is framed in an encouraging and empathetic way, clients learn from you how to approach their negative and



destructive ways in both a critical yet forgiving and altruistic way. Self hatred and overly harsh criticism can result in even more damaging, potentially life threatening outcomes, so it's important that we set an example to our clients as to how to critically hold oneself accountable without destroying ourselves, mentally and physically.

CHANGE IS MOTIVATED BY A SOCIAL INTEREST

This final point reinforces the point stressed at the beginning of the theory, which is: people are going to be motivated to do things in life if they are promised more meaningful connections with other people.

While social interest has altruistic elements, it accrues a sense of well-being from finding meaning in life, by freeing oneself from self-centred perceptions, and from participating in the wider world. A sense of belonging reduces feelings of isolation and loneliness, inferiority complexes, mental ill-health, addiction issues, and anti-social behaviour. If an individual has no social interest, their goal is, by default, one of personal superiority. This is not heinous in itself: it's essential to remember that these individuals were not taught to find importance in social interest by their guardians. Social interest was not nurtured in them, and therefore they now struggle to know who they are and what they should do in life. It is therefore our job to help them see that their answer lies in finding goals which are socially orientated, and that they can find meaning and purpose outside of themselves.

